4: Pierson Z-4, 5 (1935-1937) 1967
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CHAPTER III

CASA GRANDE AND *SENZALA*[1]

EVEN as late as the second quarter of the nineteenth century a visitor to Brazil wrote: "Again and again, while travelling in the interior, I have seen troops of new slaves of both sexes, who could not speak a single word of Portuguese, varying from twenty to one hundred individuals, marched inland for sale, or already belonging to proprietors of plantations."[2] These newly imported Africans were known as *negros novos*, or "new Negroes."[3]

Since the major portion of African importations into Bahia came from contiguous territory in Africa, the Negroes ordinarily brought with them closely related dialects and, consequently, could more easily communicate among themselves in African tongues. Gradually there came into general use, especially among the influential semi-independent *negros de ganho*, an African language known as Nagô,[4] which by facilitating intercommunication intensified the Negroes' moral isolation from the white world and retarded the whole acculturation process. Nagô continued for a long time to

[1] The "Big House" and the "slave quarters."

[2] George Gardner, *Travels in the Interior of Brazil, 1836–1841* (London, 1849), p. 12.

[3] Nina Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1932), p. 187.

[4] "Like the French, we in Bahia call Nagôs all Negroes from the Slave Coast who speak the Yoruba language. Of this group we have received slaves from all the smaller subdivisions, from Oyó the capital of Yoruba, from Ilorin, Ige-sha, Ibadan, Ifé, Iebú, Egba, Lagos, etc." (*ibid.*, p. 157).

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giance from numerous and zealous devotees. African dances still invaded the popular festivals of the Europeans to such an extent that vigorous protests on the part of the white citizenry appeared in the newspapers.[16] Numerous images employed in the fetish worship were imported from Africa, and others were made by Negro sculptors in Bahia.

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One occasionally encountered Negroes who in Africa had been chiefs or other dignitaries of considerable power and influence. Although in Brazil they shared the fortunes of a slave with their former subjects, they nevertheless often received allegiance and great reverence from them. On a chance meeting in the street these personages were, we are told, "saluted respectfully, their hands kissed, and a blessing requested of them." Even their masters were reported to have paid them, in several cases, considerable respect.

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Slaves who were in close contact with their masters, especially the house servants, soon became, by the very necessities of the situation, at least to some extent bilingual. And their offspring, reared in close contact with the children of their masters, acquired little, if any, African vocabulary and came almost exclusively to speak Portuguese. Thus, about 1800, Koster wrote from Pernambuco, "Portuguese

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[16] In the *Jornal de Noticias* for February 12, 1901, a white citizen wrote: "I wish to protest against the way in which this great civilized festival [Carnival] is being Africanized." Three days later the following was published: "These infamous Africanized groups *de canzás* and *buzios* which, far from adding to the brilliance of our Carnival festival, bring shame upon the name of Bahia .... have since yesterday been keeping up their infernal tumult." Immediately preceding the opening of Carnival the following year there appeared in the *Jornal de Noticias* (February 5, 1902) the following note: "If during these former Carnival festivals when the popular enthusiasm has been greatly aroused by the passage of the victorious floats .... these groups of *Africanos* have been repugnant, what will the Carnival of 1902 turn out to be, unless the police take effective measures to prevent our streets from looking like *terreiros* where fetish practices reign amid a retinue of *ogans* and their *canzás* and tambourines?" (Rodrigues, *op. cit.*, pp. 236–38).

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. . . . is spoken by all the slaves; and their own dialects are allowed to lie dormant until they are by many . . . . quite forgotten."[17] With the acquisition of the master's language went quite naturally other European habits and customs, and the group of assimilated Negroes, known as *ladinos*, grew in numbers relatively rapidly.

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Although the hardships incidental to a plantation system continued, the circumstances under which this gradual assimilation went on were ordinarily those imposed by a mild form of slavery in which the natural and continuous growth of intimate personal relations tended to further humanize the institution and to modify its formal and legal character to such an extent that the widely traveled Richard Burton, enamored as he was of the customs of the East, could in the middle of the nineteenth century say, "Nowhere, even in oriental countries, has the 'bitter draught' so little of gall in it."[18]

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Symbolic of the intimate character of these personal relations is a custom recorded in detail and with some sense of the humor of the situation by the able French artist Debret.[19] The head of a Brazilian household is depicted setting out with his family, all in gala attire, for a customary Sunday promenade. The entire group is in single file, the two

[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

[18] Sir Richard F. Burton, *Explorations of the Highlands of the Brazil* (2 vols.; London, 1869), I, 270.

[19] Invited to Brazil at the request of the Brazilian emperor, Debret subsequently published three volumes of drawings and comment which together furnish a highly illuminating record of the life of Rio de Janeiro in the early part of the nineteenth century (see J. B. Debret, *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil, 1816–1831* [3 vols.; Paris, 1835]). A similar record was made by another competent artist, Maurice Rugendas. See his *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*, trans. from the German by de Colbery (3 vols.; Paris, 1835).

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virtually extinct.[3] Only an occasional individual of African birth may be found, like, for instance, a certain elderly black once prominent in the fetish cults not only of Bahia but also of Rio de Janeiro who was born in Lagos, his father having purchased his mother out of slavery in Brazil shortly before his birth and taken her to Africa. He knows four *Africanos* still living in Rio. In 1936 he met in Brotas (a subdivision of Bahia) an elderly African woman with facial scarification and almost no command of Portuguese. She has since died.

Thus, actual contact with Africa is today little more than a memory in the minds of a few of the older blacks, who recall stories told by their parents or by other Africans of persons, places, and events in Africa; or who years ago visited in the home of African ancestors or were, perhaps, personally acquainted with blacks plying their small vessels between Bahia and the West Coast. However, certain individuals of the older generation still cherish sentimental attachment to Africa, as is indicated by the expression occasionally heard on the lips of an elderly Negro, as he reverently turns his eyes upward toward the sky, "Sou filho de dois Africanos, graças a Deus!"[4] "If I had the money," remarked another black, his eyes lighting up, "I'd go to Africa, to Abeokuta, build me a house, and live like a man ought to."

An elderly Bahian Negro recalled:

My mother was just a young girl when she was captured by a warrior in Africa. He wanted to sell her to a slave trader in Dahomey.

[3] Since lower-class Negroes who have difficulty in speaking correct Portuguese occasionally attempt to cover up their chagrin by saying that they are *Africanos*, and others, participating in social circles where prestige attaches to the native-born African, may deliberately misstate their origin, the incautious observer may be led erroneously to think that there are a considerable number of Africans still living in Bahia.

[4] "My father and mother were both Africans, thank God!"

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Although it is exceedingly doubtful if there is in Bahia today anyone of African descent who does not speak Portuguese, a few individuals can and on occasion do converse in Nagô. One may also hear Gêge spoken, as well as those languages known locally as "Angola" and "Congo." However, the use of these tongues is very largely confined to the ritual of the *candomblé*, although at times one hears in the homes of blacks the Nagô greeting, "Ô-kú á-sán!" and the parting salutation, "Ôdí-ólá-ô!" and even conversations in Nagô. Many African words are to be found in the predominantly Portuguese speech of the lower class, a limited number of which have become common to all Bahia and, to some extent, to all Brazil. Approximately three hundred of the latter were noted.

Certain gestures are to be observed among the lower-class blacks which are not common to the general population; for example, the *legua de beiço*, or slight extension of the lower lip when indicating distance (the words accompanying may be "one league," but the sense is much farther); and the *muxóxó*, or pursing of the lips as the lower portion of the face is pushed forward and upward, signifying disdain. Approbation is indicated by touching the tips of the fingers to pursed lips and withdrawing them while making a kissing sound. Silence is compelled by grasping the upper lip with the tips of the fingers. The act of eating is indicated by closing and opening the right hand before the mouth, and the act of drinking by raising the right hand before the face, flexing the three middle digits, and, with thumb and little finger extended, raising and lowering the hand at the wrist. The height of a human being is demonstrated by extending the

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184 guage, ceremonial dress, dance, song and pantheon, these
[178] centers differ from the *candomblés* known as "Congo" or
"Angola," in which Bantú dialects are spoken, Loanda and
Benguela become sacred places, and Tempo and the Angolan
[177] chief Kissimbe are worshiped. They differ also from the
apparently more recently organized *caboclo candomblés*
whose ritual is, in varying degrees from *seita* to *seita*, a
mixture of the rituals of the other cults, together with dances
and a pantheon of Tupi origin, the latter of which includes
Tupan, an important Tupi deity, and Tupinambá, apparent-
ly a personification of the cannibal tribe by that name which
inhabited the Bahian coast at the coming of the Europeans.
•[191] The *caboclo candomblés* carry on their ceremonies principally
in Portuguese, with the addition of certain phrases of African
origin, usually much corrupted, which have been picked up
[177] from Gêge-Nagô or Congo-Angola *seitas*, and a few words of
Tupi derivation. Feathers, the bow and arrow, and other
Indian cultural elements enter into their ritual.

794 This borrowing of ceremonial elements on the part of
184 *caboclo* imitators, who in many, if not most, cases have not
178 been reared in the African tradition, is bitterly resented
by the more orthodox and scrupulous *Africanos*, particularly
those of the Gêge-Nagô *seitas*. As a Negro once said, "Si
seja mistura, é bobagem" ("If it's mixed, it's nonsense").
A leader of a Nagô cult once burst out:

> This fellow João da Pedra Preta! What a disgraceful whelp! His forebears, what did they know? Were they brought up in the *seita*, and did they "deixaram o cargo" [will the office of priest] to him? No! He came here from the *sertão* and started a *candomblé*. Picked up a little Gêge, a little Nagô, a little Congo, a little Indian stuff, and so on. A disgraceful mixture!

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office of priest) to him. He is dedicated to the same *orixá*, Ogun, as was she, and speaks, he claims, "a little of six different African languages: Nagô, Gêge, Ige-chá, Queito, Egba, and Musurumi." He owns "a roomful" of ceremonial costumes, one of which is said to have cost six contos (approximately $360). He considers his task to be that of "doing good" and refuses to deal in black magic, an attitude which has cost him, it is said, "much money."[1] He is godfather to approximately a hundred and fifteen children and is soon to be godfather to nine others who are on the point of receiving the baptismal ceremony. He visits about the Reconcavo, particularly in Cachoeira, exercising his office of *pae de santo*, and is said to have paid similar visits to Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Maranhão, and Pará, in each of which he has "made" several *filhas* and "confirmed" *ogans*.

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The *achôgun*, or sacrificer, is an elderly black with a kindly face and snow-white hair. The leader of the drummers, or the *alabê*, a jolly black whose mother (now deceased) was a *mãe de santo* in Cidade de Palha, is very expert with the drums, speaks Nagô, and sings in a high-pitched but rather pleasant voice the African *cantigas*, or ritualistic songs. An *ogan* says of him, proudly, "He knows almost as much about African things as a *pae de santo*."

An elderly Negro woman, who walks haltingly with a cane, attends every ceremony. Younger friends carefully help her to a seat where she can see everything that goes on. Leaning forward on her cane, her intelligent eyes wide open, her face continually breaking into beaming smiles, she joins

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[1] An *ogan* of this *seita* says that a *pae de santo* in Itapoan named Gregorio (now deceased) once declined twelve contos (approximately $750) "to make a man mad." This *ogan* knows, however, a *mãe de santo* who, as he says, became angered at the remarks of a young skeptic and "made a *negocio*" (literally a "business"; i.e., black magic) which "drove him mad in two days."

[SALVADOR]

The antagonism of the /47 cont./ inhabitants of Bahia against the Spanish merchants is expressed, aside from the manifestations pointed out in another chapter, by the belief that they are responsible for the discrimination that is practiced against colored people in certain recreational clubs. In the trade of textiles and petty retail objects, such as the Syrians, Lebanese, Arabs, and Turks carry on in little shops, there are no longer many openings possible for colored people. The Arab merchants accept colored employees to work at the counter in their establishments, but, since these are generally modest family enterprises, their few light descendants of mixed blood or morenos remain in the lower or intermediate strata of the population.

In the offices of large export or import firms made up in part of Europeans (Germans, English, Swiss), colored persons are admitted and may obtain positions carrying some responsibility, but they rarely reach the rank of owners. The European merchants, numerous informants say, have the reputation of being liberal with their employees and other colored persons with whom they do business or who collaborate in their activities: harbor services, transport, transit, navigation. A wealthy, dark mulatto merchant states that his transport enterprise works a great deal for large /48/ foreign firms: "The English are particularly pleasant in that they help their colored employees and promote them to the secretariat of management." They often bring them gifts from Europe, invite them to their clubs, and are happy when some of them speak their language. "The German merchants who had very large firms in Bahia in the old days were very good to their colored assistants; they were very jealous of their language, however, and seemed not to like it at all when a Black spoke German. Some European firms honor their employees, even the Blacks, when they complete 20 or 30 years of service and give them bonuses on this occasion. But they do not promote them to important posts, sometimes because of their incompetence. The same thing does not happen with Brazilian firms, which are not accessible to colored people."